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**Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives**

## Statement submitted by Human Rights Advocates, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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## Statement

## Addressing access and attainment of education and employment as means for preventing human trafficking

1. Human Rights Advocates is a non-profit organization, dedicated to promoting and protecting international human rights in the United States of America and abroad. Although there are many methods to reducing the occurrence of forced labour, the present statement focuses on the access and attainment of education by girls and gainful employment by women as a means of preventing vulnerability to human trafficking.

2. Because human trafficking operates in the private sphere, reliable numbers on victims are hard to come by. According to the *United States Department of State Trafficking in Persons Report* (2008 and 2010) most worldwide estimates hover around 800,000 persons per year trafficked globally, with 12.3 million people in some form of slavery at any given moment. Women account for at least 56 per cent of trafficking victims worldwide and represent an overwhelming majority of sex trafficking and domestic worker trafficking victims.

3. While poverty is a root cause of human trafficking, it is the lack of employment opportunities at home combined with a desire to seek out potential employment opportunities in other countries that helps create vulnerability to human trafficking. Even when the risk of human trafficking is known, economic desperation drives people to take risks involving their personal safety. Sex trafficking and domestic labour trafficking in particular are driven by gender disparity and lack of education, but most of all by a lack of viable employment.

4. Other human rights issues exacerbate human trafficking. Statelessness increases vulnerability since lack of identification and migration documentation make it less likely that a trafficking victim will seek out government resources. Armed conflict and natural disasters increase vulnerability to trafficking as people are forced to flee from their homes and communities. This displacement separates people from their sources of income, traditional social networks, language and health services, among other things. The lack of these crucial services increases the likelihood that vulnerable people will choose employment and migration where the risks are larger due to unknown working conditions. Physical and mental disabilities also increase vulnerability to trafficking. In communities where most residents are just subsisting, people with disabilities are even more marginalized since their "otherness" prohibits them from availing themselves of whatever education and employment may be available. This marginalization makes disabled individuals particularly attractive to traffickers, who may view them as being easier to control.

5. Human trafficking and forced labour occur in nearly every country: from the United States of America where estimates range from 20,000 to 50,000 victims trafficked annually, to rising economic powerhouse countries like Brazil with a huge child sex trafficking problem (between 250,000 and 400,000 children annually), to the Russian Federation where estimates range from 35,000 to 60,000 women trafficked annually. Because human trafficking is a "hidden" crime and systematic reporting of trafficking is not yet standardized, it is safe to assume those statistics are conservative estimates.

**Access to education and employment**

6. In many parts of the world, there is a distinct lack of will to educate girls. In agricultural societies especially, parents prioritize traditional gender roles in which daughters forgo education in order to stay at home, help raise their siblings and perform household labour while sons are sent to school. This cycle perpetuates gender stereotypes that contribute to girls and women being valued primarily as domestic workers and sex workers.

7. Increased access to education, by itself, will only ameliorate part of the human trafficking situation. For example, even well-educated middle-class women from the former Soviet bloc countries are vulnerable to sex trafficking. The fall of communism had an exponentially negative effect on women owing to the severe conservative backlash that accompanied the privatization of the economy.[1] The new private market economy retained male-dominated industries and provided better opportunities for men, leading to unemployment rates of up to 80 per cent for women and a 40 per cent reduction in wages comparable to men.[2] It is imperative that human trafficking prevention programmes address the needs for women to achieve gainful employment with a fair, liveable wage.

8. Sixty per cent of primary school-age children who are not in school are girls. This lack of educational access robs girls of very real gains that decrease vulnerability, improved health, fertility, improved community status and continued educational gains in future generations.

9. Access to and attainment of gainful employment provide opportunities for women to not only increase their financial situation and self-sufficiency but also to improve their state of health, community status and the educational opportunities for their children.

**Prevention**

10. Most of the legal frameworks regarding human trafficking legislation on both national and international levels involve the "three Ps": prosecution of traffickers, protection of trafficking victims and a prevention strategy. While there has been a marked increase in anti-trafficking legislation worldwide and a growing recognition of the need for comprehensive victim services, prevention strategies are still focused heavily on awareness-raising campaigns. Although attainment of education and gainful employment is promoted as a necessary ingredient in prevention, to date there has been no comprehensive push to prioritize education and employment as a primary means of attacking the root cause of human trafficking.[3]

11. While many legal instruments addressing human trafficking contain specific provisions for prevention, the language of these provisions does not clearly require State action, unlike prevention and protection provisions which require the State to take positive steps. The vagueness of the requirements regarding prevention decreases the incentive for States to implement effective programming since they

[1] Kathryn Farr, *Sex Trafficking: The Global Market in Women and Children* (New York, Worth Publishers, 2005).

[2] Ibid.

[3] Jonathan Todres, "The importance of realizing 'other rights' to prevent sex trafficking", Cardozo *Journal of Law and Gender*, vol. 12 (2006).

often include increased associated costs as well as outcomes with less visceral impact than imprisoning traffickers or rehabilitating trafficking survivors.

12. Strengthening human trafficking prevention programmes by focusing on the right to education and the right to gainful employment not only decreases girls and women's vulnerability to traffickers but positively combines with other gender equity goals, including increased self-sufficiency, decreased gender-based violence and decreased gender discrimination and contributes to broader goals such as increased access to health, peacebuilding and economic development.

13. As prevention methods, education and gainful employment increase standards of living that help keep women and girls out of the reach of traffickers. When girls have access to education, they are physically protected in classrooms and psychologically building a sense of agency through their academic achievements. Skill-building and job training provide tools for women to manifest their sense of agency and self-sufficiency. However, these important accomplishments will mean very little if there are no jobs or other employment opportunities for them to take advantage of.

14. Potential victim-centred strategies that work take a holistic approach to preventing human trafficking by addressing education, child care, skills training, job creation and community capacity-building. By addressing the various root causes surrounding poverty, effective prevention programmes create an environment that can promote a cultural shift in valuing the lives of girls and women. In addition, prevention programming that involves the presence of sponsors and leaders working directly with vulnerable populations helps to provide positive examples that combat stereotypes of women.

15. Therefore, Human Rights Advocates requests that the Commission on the Status of Women consider including the following recommendations in the agreed conclusions for its fifty-fifth session:

(a) Member States should make the prevention of human trafficking a priority, on par with prosecution and protection, by undertaking positive measures through affirmative language in domestic legislation and international instruments;

(b) The Commission should create and promote worldwide best practices on current education and employment programmes that are designed to ameliorate and prevent vulnerability to trafficking. Although each region will have site-specific programmes tailored to individual cultural groups, a compendium should be developed in consultation with international organizations such as the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, which is currently working on the ground in human trafficking prevention;

(c) The Commission should include human trafficking prevention (and its focus on reducing vulnerability) as a key strategy in gender equity programming. The trafficking prevention strategy of educating girls and providing meaningful employment to women doesn't just prevent human trafficking; it cuts across many long-standing and laudable human rights goals, such as education, reducing violence against women, increasing financial self-sufficiency and reducing stereotypes and gender discrimination.